



UNITED NATIONS  
*Office on Drugs and Crime*

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF JULIA ORMOND

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UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME

BEFORE THE

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS & INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee and staff – good morning. On behalf of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (“UNODC”) and its Executive Director, Antonio Maria Costa, who unfortunately could not join me here today, I thank you warmly for convening this hearing.

As the UN’s Goodwill Ambassador to combat human trafficking and slavery, I recently had the opportunity to visit Ghana, India, Cambodia and Thailand. I am deeply grateful to all parties for the opportunity to testify this morning about my insights and observations during those travels.

Honorable members of Congress, we applaud your outstanding efforts to combat modern day slavery, your passage of the landmark Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Law, and subsequent legislation, and are grateful to the United States government for providing in 2005 alone over \$25 million in voluntary contributions for UNODC’s work, of which over \$2 million were allocated for our anti-human trafficking efforts.

In the words of Hermann Melville: “We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads and along these sympathetic fibers our actions run as causes and return to us as results.”

So I have learnt that in the realm of trafficking,<sup>1</sup> the solutions lie in finding culturally appropriate answers that reflect not only a country's present circumstance but specifically embrace that culture's history. And often, our intertwined histories.

On my recent trip to India, I learned about the different range of debt bondage and how it keys into trafficking and modern-day slavery.

Debt bondage in India exists in different levels, and as opposed to debt, it is illegal. Culturally, however, even in its severest form, the practice often is not regarded as slavery.

But within this broken system, momentum is building to regard debt bondage for its true nature – as slavery – in an effort to liberate those slaves. I visited quarries where entire villages had been enslaved for generations. Under a brutal heat, men and women clothed in beautiful saris bust up rock to make sand. I spoke with a wizened and elderly man who remembered his grandfather being enslaved. They never knew they were slaves though, until educated by a local non-governmental organization called Sankal, which helped liberate one villager, who in turn worked to liberate the next, who together worked to liberate another.

Once reaching a certain tipping point, the entire village was prepared to walk out, despite threats of violence, the burning of their village and the loss of a village girl. They now quarry their own land and have influenced many others in debt bondage. Their liberation continues; I met with villagers who were either thinking of or who had successfully run for local election, and who have participated in a movement that has now freed more than 10,000 slaves. To witness their backbreaking work, to hear their stories, it is difficult to comprehend their being unaware of their own plight.

I had flown to New Delhi from a conference in Bangkok, but as a British citizen, my journey to India really had begun much earlier. On 2nd February 1835 Lord Macaulay addressed the British Parliament:

*I have traveled across the great length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and Therefore, I propose that*

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<sup>1</sup> “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs; Article 3, paragraph (a) of the [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons](#), especially Women and Children, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

*we replace her old & ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self esteem, their native self culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation.*

This was the genesis of British policy that has hugely contributed to India's current challenges and relationship to modern-day slavery. Thankfully, India now enjoys enormous expansion, and even those liberated only recently from slavery have developed an unbroken self-esteem.

I know how lucky I am to have been born into a different generation. To have been born when and where I was – in a country where no one is shooting at me, I face no unnecessary risk of dying of HIV/AIDS, nor do I lack access to clean water. But merely through a twist do I hear about – rather than experience – the horrors of trafficking and slavery, because I know in my heart that “there but for the grace of God go I.” I know that the victims are victims of circumstance. All of us must change that circumstance, and change it we can.

The path has been created with the 2000 UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which contains the Anti-Trafficking Protocol. Otherwise known as the Palermo Protocol, this document lays out a holistic strategy, referred to as the “Three Ps”: Prevention, Protection and Prosecution. By implementing this approach, we can change the circumstance.

To tackle prevention, among other areas, we must educate through skills training for adults, so that they are not vulnerable to being trafficked, trafficking their own children, or becoming traffickers themselves.

In prosecution, Governments must deal seriously with corruption. They must understand that the international community condemns corruption, which deters investment in their country, thus providing a breeding ground to trafficking and slavery. The rule of law is meaningless without enforcement. And enforcement is meaningless without a strong and just judicial system.

Trafficking is one of the most fantastically difficult problems that we face today. But traffickers cannot create demand; were there no demand whatsoever, criminals would be unlikely to generate it, because criminal businesses tend to be opportunistic and not developmental. The Anti-Trafficking Protocol presents our opportunity to unite internationally against this criminal element, which threatens our global security. It provides a consensus definition of trafficking that becomes the springboard to change.

As the UNODC Goodwill Ambassador, I face a steep learning curve. However, in a short amount of time I have been horrified by the extent of the problem – the searing depth of pain experienced by the victims, and the extraordinary level of profit to the traffickers. And so I have been given permission to add my own “P” to the “Three Ps” of prevention, protection and prosecution: Prioritize. [Prioritization?]

If we are to reverse course on the rise of trafficking, one crucial reality has become clear to me – governments, and only governments, are uniquely situated to implement the systemic changes necessary.

Thousands of extraordinary NGOs and CSOs are providing incredibly effective rehabilitation for the victims. Yet while they can be supportive, they cannot attack the root problems in the same way as Governments. Governments and member states need to rise to the challenge of making this issue a priority and work together – without shaming and blaming – to create a structure recognizing the extremity of this issue.

Your presence here today reflects not only the highly commendable lead assumed by the United States. It is, I trust, a reflection of this country's commitment and stamina moving forward. Despite the difficulties even in defining the nature of trafficking, the U.S. government already has shown particular tenacity. Moreover, your bipartisan collaboration has yielded exemplary results. It is an honor to speak before you, and I urge the Congress to continue to recognize and embrace this Nation's global influence on other member states, not least of all by its own internal example.

It is clear that before prevention, protection, prosecution and prioritization can be effective, we must form a clear picture of the nature of this beast. And as we gathered further research, this grim picture becomes more clear.

Despite the excellent work demonstrated in the recent U.N. Global Report on Trafficking in persons and the (second?) recently released TIP report, we all know that we don't yet have accurate statistics on trafficking and slavery because of its inherently covert nature.

We do know, however, that it's millions of people and it's billions of dollars and that it is rivaling the drug trade. We do know that criminals are in fact shifting from the trafficking of weapons and drugs into the trafficking of people – especially children – because until we prioritize, the traffickers will profit.

Tass, the Russian News service, reported in 2002 that increasingly organized crime is moving away from guns, drugs and tobacco to children, especially pornography. This is due to its very low cost, ease to produce, and huge consumer demand. It is extremely profitable with very low risk.

One of the things that research reveals is why people are vulnerable to being trafficked in the first place. Lack of economic opportunity and lack of free education worldwide are key contributory factors.

In recent years, Thailand has made great strides to offer and sustain girls' education. This effort greatly has reduced the numbers of Thai girls falling victim to trafficking. However, the hill tribes in Thailand remain especially vulnerable. Due to an inability to speak Thai, educational options are limited, creating a strong drop-out rate and vulnerability to being trafficked. Combined with the immense cultural pressure for young girls to support their families, these hill tribe girls have become more and more present in the shelters.

The vast majority of trafficked victims are those seeking to better their lives, or the lives of their parents and children. Many families are duped into believing that their children are being taken to receive an education. By definition, all trafficked victims then are coerced, forced, or in more brutal circumstances, kidnapped and transported into slavery where they are horrifically exploited, or possibly killed.

For many years, they can be trapped in these circumstances. Commonly, they are convinced that if they try to escape, local police will punish them, deport them, throw them into jail or worse.

Frequently, traffickers convince victims that they are working to pay off debts accrued by their transportation, room, and board. In reality, however, this is an illegal debt that they can never pay off because, if they are lucky, they are provided only a meager subsistence.

Trafficked victims of all types often are held by psychological threats to their families or to themselves and are subjected to all manner of abuses. I heard the first-hand story of a domestic help who was physically, emotionally, spiritually, and sexually abused on a daily basis. After one particularly brutal beating, she was given a spade and told to dig her own grave. When she said that the police would find her body, her captor told her that he would use a special liquid to dissolve her bones so that no one could tell she'd existed. It's not what you expect when you dream of coming to California.

Another woman in America told me of how her captor gave her no food, so she had to try to grow food surreptitiously in order to survive. For years her subsistence consisted of one pot noodle each day. She slept on the cement floor of her captor's garage, unable to reach out to anyone due to a lack of community support and her inability to speak English. Repeatedly, her trafficker threatened to kill her and her family back home, should she try to escape or turn her in.

The vast majority of victims take time – often months – to open up. This makes identification more difficult, but not impossible. One Romanian victim I heard took three months to open up having been arrested in Italy working the streets, a euphemism that when she first heard it she thought meant she was going to be a street cleaner. Her first so-called client was a police officer. Often she would service police officers; she knew because they expected it for free, flashing their badge instead of payment.

We can better support victims by educating police on how to identify trafficking victims, by being knowledgeable about victims' rights, by engaging the support and resources of NGOs working on the issue, and by briefing law enforcement officials on how to deal with rape victims. It is especially important that officials recognize battered wives syndrome and Stockholm Syndrome, since victims often are in these states when and if they are discovered.

It is not acceptable that law enforcement in any country is understaffed, under-equipped and under-funded to fight trafficking. However, we need the education of all participants in the chain – whether an impoverished fisherman in Ghana, who is as much at risk of becoming a trafficker as a local child is of being trafficked. It's educating government, judicial systems, local police, border control, and Goodwill Ambassadors.

A large part of current spending goes to protection, which currently is provided by the excellent rehabilitative care of NGOs and some CSOs.

Today we shall hear the testimony of Marsha Gnezdilova and Irina Veselykh, two Russian women, who themselves were victims of trafficking. I commend them for their courage and thank them for being here today. They stand with many women globally who believe that

they are departing for better opportunities and promises of decent salaries as household help, waitresses, or teachers. Instead, they end up forced into prostitution.

Part of my role is to talk to victims, when they are willing, about their experiences. In Cambodia and Thailand, I spoke with many such women, children and men – the vast majority of whom had specifically been trafficked into forced prostitution. The conversations always are painful, and I am still learning. I believe though, that it's important to appreciate the level of abuse that virtually always goes hand-in-hand with being trafficked.

I have experienced the moving testimony of brave victims transcending their trauma in the hope of assisting others. I also have heard from ashamed and repentant traffickers, who openly acknowledge their wrong-doing, and parents who have either fallen foul of false promise or have faced the horrific moral dilemma of knowingly selling one child into a life of servitude in order to save other children.

Victims and survivors and NGOs ask that I carry their message to others that may be in a position to effect change. For me, this first-hand testimony has become a primal motivating factor.

Ironically one of the issues the UNODC itself has discovered is that they need to give specific training to female police officers who struggle to comprehend that it is possible to force someone to prostitute themselves. Some have a hard time relating to this, believing that they sooner would kill themselves. Not only the female police struggle with this misconception. In some instances, a disregard for prostitutes and their well-being reportedly has impaired political resolve.

Of course, the reality is that not everyone survives this ordeal. These people often are functionally invisible – they lack either birth records or citizenship, or they lack legal status in a country. Not surprisingly, invisible people are incredibly disposable. I have heard reports of women jumping from windows to end their plight. I have heard reports of women either shot or beaten to death for trying to escape. Often, this occurs in front of others, in order to secure their obedience.

I met with many girls and women from many shelters. Some girls so young it was hard to comprehend their fate. Girls as young as 5, 7 and 12 who had been victims of rape then sold into prostitution.

There is a specific phenomenon in this era of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Clients seeking HIV-negative assurances will pay large sums to buy very young girls, who are promised to be virginal. Over the period of a week, these girls are raped repeatedly by their client, who are satisfied only by seeing blood. The girls then are retuned to the brothel, only to be taken to clinics where they are sewn up and sold again, as many as eight or nine more times before entering a life of forced prostitution.

Other girls talked of being chained by their relatives in order to force them to enter marriage or prostitution. At an NGO called Hagar, one particular victim, whom I shall call Bopha, told me that at eleven years old, she was beaten so badly that she now struggles with a

colostomy bag. Her potential to have her own children viciously beaten from her, traffickers forced sand down her throat in an effort to strangle her, and then they left her to bleed to death.

Some NGOs in one Asian country reported that it's common for girls to be electrocuted, drugged, beaten with or without instruments; one girl lost a finger for supposedly not satisfying a client. It's common to be stripped naked and caged with snakes and insects such as scorpions and millipedes – placed not just in the cage with them but into their mouths and private parts as punishment. These girls often die from the stings and bites.

I believe it is worth reminding ourselves that this is what is termed as “force and coercion” in the Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons, and why victims often find it difficult to return home. I believe it is worth our absorbing that reality for the individuals concerned.

Trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery and has many faces, but follows very strong patterns with almost identical outcomes. This is the face of forced prostitution in today's world but in fact forced prostitution accounts for less than half of all trafficking worldwide.

Sexual abuse is often present in many different types of trafficking. One of the last girls I met with in India had been trafficked into domestic service. She is twelve. She is the victim of rape by five different men. She is seven months pregnant.

Trafficking is not just women and girls, there are many male victims too.

Imagine being three years old and being taken from your family in Pakistan and trafficked to the Middle East to be used in the elitist sport of camel racing as a jockey. Imagine being starved to keep your weight down, brutalized so you will work for nothing, and sexually abused by your captors. Imagine knowing that as you grow older and bigger, you increasingly become disposable. Imagine that life.

In Thailand, I spoke with a boy who had been trafficked into the fishing industry. He escaped by spending two days floating at sea on a barrel before luckily being rescued. In India, I met with boys who were trafficked into the carpet loom industry. One particular boy had been enslaved for ten years, since he was five years old. He showed me scars from beatings with implements from when he had tried to escape. He told of having a cut finger placed in boiling water in place of proper medical treatment.

Someone said to me that if people aren't finding evidence of trafficking, then they're not looking. It is everywhere, and it affects us all.

In Ghana they were not particularly looking for trafficking but found it when a number of bodies washed up on the shores of Lake Volta.

I recently traveled to Yeji, Ghana and worked with a local NGO called Apple, which investigates the child slavery around Lake Volta and the fishing villages. Children; some as young as four years old are made to dive in dangerous and extremely cold water to untangle nets. They are beaten with oars when they surface for breath, and then they are forced to dive again. One recalled intense memories of his nose bleeding because he was forced to dive deeper and deeper. Another described how he would calm the fish by placing his fingers in their eye sockets

and press, and how to avoid getting your fingers trapped in the gills or the fish could overpower you and may drown you. When I asked him how big the fish were, his arms spread wide.

These children are not allowed to go to school, to hospital if ill or to return to their families. Some are forced to dive at night, and many of the children drown. I was told that in years past, live but sick children would be thrown into the water with weights attached to their bodies – treated as bait. Imagine that life.

Imagine checking into the Ramada Inn in Florida, only to discover that right next door is a slave camp for male agricultural workers, held by armed guards.

In the developed world, we are simply better placed to be able to make the eradication of trafficking and modern-day slavery a priority. With the UN protocols in place on anti-trafficking, that chiefly means making it a financial priority.

While every government confronts the reality of limited resources, I think it is worth remembering that the billions of dollars that traffickers make on their victims are billions of dollars that should be going into the world's economy to make countries thrive rather than into the traffickers' pockets. These victims are a silenced work-force who, given the right amount of care and rehabilitation to set themselves on the path to sustained freedom, become productive members of society, taxpaying members of society at that.

We have a responsibility not out economic sense or out of noble obligation, but because the West has either contributed in a present cultural dynamic or is currently creating demand. We are very much part of the problem.

We need to acknowledge the effects of trade agreements on the developing world that broadens the divide between rich developed countries and the developing poor. We need to think about free people every time we think of free trade. We need to support the MDGs with a greater percentage of our GDP and seriously commit to the eradication of poverty.

Clearly we are vulnerable to this dark side of globalization and it's impact on transatlantic crime. Today more than ever we need a unified coordinated global response that asks governments to work together and make this a priority. Traffickers show a total disregard for human life, and that makes us all vulnerable to the assistance and information that can be given by traffickers to terrorists.

Traffickers cannot create demand, and criminal businesses tend to be opportunistic rather than developmental. Poverty and corruption frequently go hand in hand; trafficking and modern-day slavery thrive in corrupt environments. Trafficking cannot exist without a degree of participation from the government, the police, and the judicial system. This is the ugly face, the dark side of globalization.

It takes a tenacity and readiness to embrace and support governments around the world that demonstrate a determination to eradicate corruption and achieve transparency that perhaps could be buoyed up by an appreciation of our shared histories. And while the onus is on us to be supportive as they struggle to reach a higher goal, so we have to hold ourselves to the highest possible standards. The UN has struggled with its own issues with peacekeeping troops who



have gotten involved in trafficking. I commend the zero tolerance policy advocated by the UN. But, while the problem has been recognized and a strong strategy has been developed to combat it, we have to be more vigorous in implementation and heed Prince Zeid Al-Hussein's recent report showing that this policy is not yet effective enough.

The UN like most member states is working to achieve its mandate.

I believe one of the finest documents in existence is the UN declaration on human rights and modern day slavery is one of the most egregious violations of that document; that we all agree on. Trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery; a violation that globalization has ripped open and flung to every corner of our planet. This is not a new phenomenon – it is the surviving and thriving mutation of one of the oldest issues in the world, one we have never conquered; but humanity has now surely reached the point where we are far better placed to do so.

It has been a momentous step forward to see the UNODC and global community classify trafficking as a crime, however, it is important to remember that trafficking means the abuse over and over and over again of its victims. It means that a multitude of crimes are committed to reach the end result.

Such offenses include but are not limited to trafficking in human beings; forgery; involuntary servitude; forced or compulsory labor; debt bondage; forced marriage; forced abortion; forced pregnancy; torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; rape; sexual assault; bodily injury; murder; kidnapping; unlawful confinement; labor exploitation; withholding of identity papers; and corruption. Yet the resources committed to resolve trafficking and prosecute the criminals are nowhere near those devoted to homicide. We have to make this a priority.

But this is not yet another global problem that cannot be solved. I don't want anyone to leave believing that there are no solutions. There are fantastic models out there, and they are working.

We should all come together and devote all of our energies, values and opinions to finding concrete ways to fight this. Trafficking is a human rights issue, from child soldiers asked to fight, kill and die for someone else's cause, to camel jockeys strapped to camels in blistering desert heat, to young fishermen boys forced to dive in the dark and drown, to the crushed domestic worker, to the child raped and filmed to be abused again and again and again in internet porn.

Business communities are stepping up to take responsibility. The Cocoa Protocol put together by Free the Slaves demonstrates the cocoa industry's commitment to bringing slave-free labor practices to the Ivory Coast and Ghana. Microsoft's initiative of worldwide training for police on computer facilitated crimes against children is another excellent initiative. They deserve our thanks, our respect and our attention.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank and commend all of the NGOs and shelters that have helped me and whose work is an example to us all of how it should be.

The International Organization for Migration, in collaboration with Apple and other local NGOs have implemented programs that are now close to releasing 1,000 of those trafficked children around Lake Volta, bringing alternative sustainable freedom to them and their families.

In Cambodia, the NGO called Hagar provides such a fabulously comprehensive approach showing that rehabilitated victims can take on skills training and work in profitable businesses, from design to catering to soy product manufacturing, to such a successful degree that they now sell some of their products in Neiman Marcus.

They helped now eleven-year old and barren Bopha stand before a judge, and with a hoarse but clear voice, she spoke out to send her trafficker to prison for seventeen years.

Girls at another shelter reminded me of the words of Pablo Neruda: “You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming.”

Nothing is more moving to me than the resilience and spiritual strength shown by victims. Those girls who suffered mercilessly who have been helped to re-find their voices and joyfully sing about walking into the light. The terrifyingly young girls whose virginity was repeatedly stripped from them have found the dignity and grace to sing of the flowering that is our passage to womanhood.

We as men and women must do everything in our power to support the shelters work and make it the safety-net for victims not rely on the victims to deliver the solution of piece-meal prosecution.

The media has played a phenomenal role in bringing this issue to the public’s attention. So often issues don’t get traction because politicians feel that the public hasn’t shown that it cares enough. But the media has ensured that the public knows about this issue, and the public definitely cares.

We must appreciate that while modern-day slavery and trafficking is a global issue, it is also in our backyard.

We must make trafficking a priority.

We must focus on solutions.

We must allocate the resources needed to achieve the vision allowed by the anti-trafficking protocol.

Together, we can achieve these goals – strategically and financially. To that end, I look forward to working with you all.

Thank you, and I would be glad to answer any questions.

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